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Sustainable development: protection of global climate for present and future generations of humankind

Update on progress towards the development of an action plan for integrating sustainable development practices into Secretariat-wide operations and facilities management

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

In response to the request of the General Assembly, in paragraph 14 of its resolution 70/205, the present note provides an update on progress made towards the development of the requested action plan for the Secretariat aimed at integrating sustainable development practices into its operations and facilities management. The note summarizes the scope, structure, roles and responsibilities necessary for the implementation of the plan.

The Secretary-General will develop, as soon as possible, or by 2020, if practicable, the action plan for the Secretariat, in the form of an environmental management system, including a schedule of required activities and milestones, so that the Secretariat does not, through its operations or facilities management, have a negative impact on the climate.

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I. Introduction

1. On 22 June 2012, in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled "The future we want", Heads of State and Government and high-level representatives called upon the United Nations system to improve the management of facilities and operations by taking into account sustainable development practices, building on existing efforts and promoting cost effectiveness, and in accordance with legislative frameworks, including financial rules and regulations, while maintaining accountability to Member States.[1]

2. That call was endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 66/288 and reiterated in paragraph 15 of its resolution 67/226 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system.

3. On 22 December 2015, the General Assembly adopted resolution 70/205, in paragraph 14 of which it requested the Secretary-General, as a follow-up to paragraph 96 of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, to submit an action plan as soon as possible, or by 2020, if practicable, for the Secretariat that would be designed to work within existing procurement rules and policies aimed at integrating sustainable development practices into its operations and facilities management, building on existing efforts and promoting cost effectiveness, and in accordance with legislative frameworks, including financial rules and regulations, while maintaining accountability to Member States, with the specific goal of a United Nations that does not, through its operations or facilities management, have a negative impact on the climate.

II. Sustainable Development Goals and sustainability management

4. On 25 September 2015, the General Assembly unanimously adopted resolution 70/1, entitled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", in which it agreed on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 related targets. In that resolution, the Assembly also made a commitment to making fundamental changes in the way that our societies produce and consume goods and services and stated that Governments, international organizations, the business sector and other non-State actors and individuals must contribute to changing unsustainable consumption and production patterns.

5. On 4 November 2016, the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, in which the parties to the Convention resolved to keep global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius and to pursue efforts to limit temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, entered into force. This goal is in line with Sustainable Development Goal 13.

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[1] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 20-22 June 2012* (A/CONF.216/16), chap. I, resolution 1, annex, para. 96.

6. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 70/205, the United Nations is expected to contribute to these goals by integrating sustainable development practices into its own management practices.

7. The Environment Management Group, a United Nations system-wide coordination body on environment chaired by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), has been working on these issues since 2008 and has established a working group on environmental sustainability management at the United Nations. Following the decisions of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the implementation of a United Nations climate neutral strategy (2007), the introduction of environmental management systems (2013) and a United Nations road map towards climate neutrality by 2020 (2015),[2] the Environment Management Group is responsible for facilitating the implementation of the climate neutral strategy and assisting the efforts of the organizations of the United Nations system to reduce the environmental impacts of their facilities and operations through the implementation of organization-specific environmental management systems.

8. In December 2011, a senior level steering group on environmental sustainability management was established for United Nations Headquarters in New York. In addition to directing the future development of the action plan, the steering group has guided a number of initiatives that have been undertaken at Headquarters, including: the sourcing of renewable electrical energy; a management strategy for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions; the replacement of individual printers with centrally managed shared printers to reduce energy, toner and paper use; and an internal communications campaign to raise awareness of environmental issues in the workplace.

9. An environmental management system uses a structured approach designed to help organizations to manage their environmental impacts and improve their environmental performance over time and within a scope defined by the organizations themselves. An environmental management system provides a structure for the integration of environmental considerations into key management areas such as training, records management, inspections and the establishment of objectives and policies.

III. Purpose

10. In line with General Assembly resolutions 66/288 (para. 96), 67/226 (para. 15) and 70/205 (para. 14), the action plan for the Secretariat would, through the implementation of an environmental management system, aim at integrating sustainable development practices into its operations and facilities management. It would build on existing efforts and promote cost effectiveness while maintaining accountability to Member States. In addition, the action plan would allow the Secretariat to internalize the management of its facilities and operations and contribute to different Sustainable Development Goals and targets, including the goal of taking urgent action to combat climate change, and any negative impact on

[2] CEB/2007/2, CEB/2013/1 and CEB/2015/1.

climate from the Secretariat's operations and facilities management, and the goal of ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns.[1]

IV. Scope

11. The Secretariat's action plan would apply to all operations and facilities management procedures, decisions, activities and practices of the Secretariat at Headquarters, offices away from Headquarters, the regional commissions and field operations and missions.

V. Implementation structure and governance

12. The Secretariat operates in countries with a great variety of infrastructures, markets and local cultures, and what can be done to reduce the environmental and climate impact of its operations varies from location to location.

13. The Secretary-General intends to revise the terms of reference of the existing senior level steering group on environmental sustainability management and to adjust the membership to incorporate Secretariat-wide representation in order to provide an overarching Secretariat-wide environmental management system coordination mechanism. This coordination mechanism will provide a framework for the sharing and leveraging of existing positive experiences and practices in the field of environmental management while improving coordination and internal communications, with the goal of a continuous improvement in resource use.

14. The central support to locations would be based on the guidance provided by the above-mentioned senior level steering group on environmental sustainability management at the United Nations.

15. The action plan would entail a harmonized but decentralized approach to the reduction of the United Nations environmental footprint, intended to allow each geographic location of the Secretariat to determine the most relevant environmental impacts of their activities, propose planned actions to address these impacts and periodically verify their effectiveness.

16. Such a systematic approach would help the Secretariat — in all of its locations — to prioritize management of the most significant environmental risks where they occur and to support the implementation of locally viable measures first.

17. Each geographic location of the United Nations Secretariat, including each special political and peacekeeping mission, would be expected to progressively integrate environmental sustainability practices into its operations and facilities management. United Nations field missions have already started doing so, following the approval of the 2009 environmental policy for field missions. The General Assembly, in its resolution 70/286 (para. 31), requested the Secretary-General to continue his efforts to reduce the overall environmental footprint of each

[1] The full implementation of an environmental management system by the Secretariat could positively contribute, inter alia, to Sustainable Development Goal targets and indicators 3.9, 4.7, 6.1-6.4, 7.2, 7.3, 9.4, 9.a, 11.2, 11.4, 11.7, 11.b, 12.2-12.8, 13.2, 13.3, 15.1, 15.5, 15.7, 15.8, 17.18 and 17.19.

peacekeeping mission, including by implementing environmentally friendly waste management and power generation systems, in full compliance with the relevant rules and regulations, including, but not limited to, the United Nations environmental and waste management policy and procedures. The Security Council has also addressed this issue through a number of mandates in recent years.[4] The Department of Field Support is therefore already working on an environment strategy, including the integration of an environmental management system into its operations.

18. The core objectives of each environmental management system would be: to analyse, plan and periodically review the environmental aspects of operations and facilities management; to select environmental objectives related to those aspects; and to implement strategies for achieving them. The system would be integrated into existing management processes and be designed to respect existing rules and regulations.[5]

19. The Secretariat would capitalize on existing efforts in facilities and operations to use resources more efficiently and integrate them into the environmental management systems in order to provide a more complete context. The systems would also be designed to facilitate synergies and joint initiatives for meeting environmental objectives common to one or more geographic locations.

20. The action plan would be designed to develop a Secretariat-wide environmental policy along with the implementation of environmental management systems at each geographic location.

A. Local technical teams

21. Except for United Nations field operations, which will be reporting directly to the Department of Field Support, each environmental management system would operate at the local level through the existing technical team responsible for facilities and operations under the direction of a senior management steering group at the relevant geographic location. Each senior management steering group would report to the Secretariat-wide environmental management system coordination mechanism, as would the Department of Field Support on behalf of the field operations and missions. The technical teams would undertake periodic assessments of the policies, procedures and activities at their respective geographic locations and analyse the related environmental impacts, lessons learned and opportunities for improvement and synergies.

B. Local senior level steering groups

22. The senior management steering groups would prioritize areas of focus for environmental improvement and decide on sustainability objectives that, in the local

[4] For the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, see Security Council resolutions 2100 (2013), 2164 (2014), 2227 (2015) and 2295 (2016); for the United Nations Support Office in Somalia, see Security Council resolution 2245 (2015).

[5] Including financial regulation 5.12.

context, would lead to the overall goals defined by the General Assembly in its resolution 70/205.

23. The technical teams would implement specific activities that would lead to the achievement of the goals, track progress towards them and submit annual progress reports to the steering groups.

24. The reports of the environmental management systems from all geographic locations would be submitted to the Secretariat-wide environmental management system coordination mechanism. Using information from the annual reports, as well as from the periodic assessments of environmental impacts at their locations, each steering group would reassess its environmental management priorities and objectives. Processes for the continuous monitoring and improvement of the environmental management systems themselves, and of the overall coordination mechanism, would be an integral part of the local technical, local senior and Secretariat-wide programme of work.

VI. No negative impact on the climate by 2020

25. An initial goal of the environmental management systems across the Secretariat would be to avoid a negative impact on the climate, but they would also take other environmental objectives into account in terms of Secretariat operations and facilities management. This is understood to mean that all entities would undertake efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other environmental impacts as far as possible while meeting their business needs and delivering their mandates. The Secretariat is already tracking its greenhouse gas emissions, using a standard methodology across the entire United Nations system.

26. The action plan would consider employing traditional and innovative but proven approaches — in part, in whole or in combination — to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and achieve other environmental objectives. Examples of such approaches would include: infrastructure enhancements that improve energy efficiency; increased use of renewable energy sources such as solar power; the use of fuel-efficient ground transport; and improved water and waste management practices.

VII. Reporting on achievements

27. As a result of the implementation of environmental management systems at all locations, the Secretariat would report on the improvements achieved through existing channels, including through reports of the Secretary-General mandated by the General Assembly that address the mainstreaming of the three dimensions of sustainable development throughout the United Nations system.

VIII. Conclusion

28. The Secretariat is committed to taking an active part in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and of the Sustainable Development

Goals by integrating sustainable development practices into its management of facilities and operations.

IX. Next steps

29. The Secretariat will establish a Secretariat-wide environmental management system coordination mechanism, including the establishment of senior management steering groups at each geographic location and environmental management systems at the various geographic locations of the United Nations Secretariat, as described in section V above.

30. On the basis of the work of the Secretariat-wide environmental management system coordination mechanism and of the environmental management systems at the various geographic locations, the Secretariat will develop, as soon as possible, or by 2020, if practicable, the action plan, including a schedule of required activities and milestones, so that it does not, through its operations or facilities management, have a negative impact on the climate.